

## **The Existence of Religious Studies in Sharia Regions: West Sumatra and Aceh**

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### **Abstract**

So far, there have been many studies on the dynamics and development of the religious studies in Indonesia. In general, the study covers at least two major themes, namely historical development studies and methodological studies. Generally, the existing studies are dominantly based on the development and reflection of the Religious Studies in Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Bandung. However, it is not common to discuss religious studies in other areas such as West Sumatra and Aceh, which are sharia regions in Indonesia. This paper aims to find out how the existence of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Using a case study qualitative research method, this article shows that the Department of Religious Studies, both UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, still exist in their respective regions. Although the two Department are still not well known by the public, the contribution of the two Department to religious life has provided a place to balance the religious life of the people of West Sumatra and Aceh. The real contributions that have been made to the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh in West Sumatra and Aceh are, *first*, increasing religious inclusiveness; *second*, the driving force of religious moderation; *third*, activists of the discourse of tolerance; *fourth*, increasing inter-religious dialogue.

Keywords: contribution; existence; strategy; religious studies

### **Abstrak**

Sejauh ini kajian tentang dinamika dan perkembangan studi agama-agama telah banyak bermunculan di Indonesia. Secara umum kajian tersebut mencakup sedikitnya dua tema besar yaitu kajian sejarah perkembangan dan kajian metodologis. Umumnya kajian yang ada dominan berdasarkan pada perkembangan dan refleksi Studi Agama-Agama di Yogyakarta, Jakarta dan Bandung. Namun belum jamak yang membahas studi agama di daerah lain seperti Sumatera Barat dan Aceh yang merupakan daerah syariah di Indonesia. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana eksistensi Prodi Studi Agama-Agama UIN Imam Bonjol Padang dan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif studi kasus, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa Prodi Studi Agama-Agama baik UIN Imam Bonjol Padang maupun UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh tetap eksis di daerah masing-masing. Walau kedua prodi tersebut masih kurang dikenal oleh masyarakat, tapi kontribusi kedua prodi terhadap kehidupan keagamaan telah memberi tempat sebagai penyeimbang kehidupan keagamaan masyarakat Sumatera Barat dan Aceh. Kontribusi nyata yang telah dilakukan Prodi Studi Agama-Agama UIN Imam Bonjol Padang dan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Sumatera Barat dan Aceh adalah *pertama*, meningkatkan inklusifitas beragama; *kedua*, penggerak moderasi beragama; *ketiga*, penggiat wacana toleransi; *keempat*, meningkatkan dialog antarumat beragama.

Kata Kunci: kontribusi; eksistensi; strategi; studi agama

## **INTRODUCTION**

Religious studies were originally rooted in the womb of the church, so that they were identical with the interests of the church (missionary) (Alles 2007). However, in its development, the study of religion not only separated itself from the church but followed the development of the rational and value-free modern world of the West. Polemical, agitative and dominative religious studies have changed drastically to become rational and value-free. If in the period the Church used a theological approach more dominantly, in the modern period it developed using a social science and humanities approach.

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The spirit of scientific progress that developed in the 19th century made a change in the orientation of religious studies which no longer primordial (the Church) or for the spread of religion but more based on the spirit of the scientific method. For example, the study of Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) who introduced a scientific approach to religion while giving a public lecture in London in February 1870. Max Muller promoted a new scientific discipline which called "the science of religion" (Pals 2015). Further explanation regarding the new scientific discipline can be traced from Max Muller's two books entitled *Comparative Mythology* (1856) and *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1970) (Ghazali 2000). Since the public lecture given by Max Muller, scientific studies of religion have continued to develop under various titles, such as *Comparative Religion*, *The Study of Comparative Religion*, *The Study of Comparative Religions* or *Comparative Studies of Religions*, *Study of Religions*, *Religious Studies* and others (Bahari 2015).

Scientific studies of religion are not only developing in the modern Western world but also in various parts of the world including in Southeast Asia, Indonesia. Formally-academic, religious studies in Indonesia were first introduced by Mukti Ali in 1961 in Yogyakarta named *Comparative Religion*. Even though Mukti Ali introduced religious studies or comparative religious studies at IAIN which were thick with Islamic nuances, the religious studies that were introduced were independent, objective and scientifically rational. (Gem 2000). For example, this can be seen in the course materials offered such as: *Comparative Religion*, *Sociology of Religion*, *Philosophy of Religion*, *Psychology of Religion*, *Christology*, *Christian Dogmatics*, *Church History*, *Biblical Interpretation*, *Orientalism and Mysticism* (Ali 1995).

The characteristics of independent, objective and scientifically rational religious studies developed by Mukti Ali are a general feature of religious studies in Indonesia, including in West Sumatra and Aceh due to the fact that the curriculum for the Department of Comparative Religion refers to the courses formulated by Mukti Ali. Even though West Sumatra and Aceh are thick with Islamic overtones, the results of the studies of religious scholars in West Sumatra and Aceh tend to be independent, objective and scientifically rational. For example, *Aktualisasi Humanisme Religius Menuju Humanisme Spiritual dalam Bingkai Filsafat Agama* (Amin 2013); *Ayer dan Kritik Logical-Positivism: Studi Metafisika Ketuhanan* (Amin 2015); *Understanding The Radicalism Movement in Indonesia: A Conflict Approach to The Rise to Terrorism* (Shalihin 2017); *Preventing Religious Radicalism Based on Local Wisdom: Interrelation of Tarekat, Adat, and Local Authority in Padang Pariaman, West Sumatera, Indonesia* (Sefriyono and Mukhibat 2018); *Sufism and Religious Practices in Modern Lifestyle* (Suraiya It., Rijal, and Hudi Prasajo 2019); *Negotiation of Tradition, Islam, and Modernity in the Kaum Mudo Islamic Reform Movement in Minangkabau* (Ashadi 2019); *Jihad Digital: Pembangkaian Narasi Kontra Radikalisasi NU Online di Dunia Maya* (Sefriyono 2020); *Resisted Versus Fascinated: The Muslim-Christian Relationship in The Post-Regional Autonomy in Padang, West Sumatera* (Ashadi and Shalihin 2020); *Ramadan and Strengthening of the Social Capital of Indonesian Muslim Communities* (Shalihin et al. 2020).

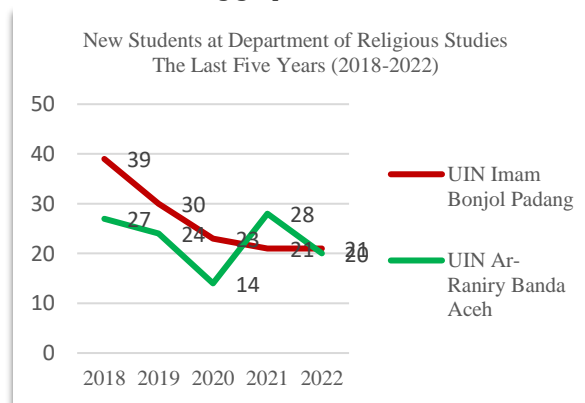
On the other hand, the results of studies and surveys have shown signs of strengthening Islamic identity accompanied by a tendency to be less tolerant of religion in West Sumatra and Aceh. After the reform, there has been a fundamental change in Indonesia, namely the regional autonomy system. One of the implications of regional autonomy is the emergence of regional regulations with Islamic nuances (Perda Syariah). With the existence of regional autonomy, regional regulations with Islamic nuances flourished in West Sumatra and Aceh. The momentum of regional autonomy is being utilized by the Government and the people of West Sumatra in accordance with the philosophy of life of the Minang People *Mambangik Batang Tarandam*. The results of Mellisa Crouch's study show that West Sumatra is the province with the most births of Sharia regulations which are prone to discrimination against weak groups such as women, children, the poor and religious minorities (Crouch 2009).

Likewise in Aceh, the conflict between Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia which lasted for a long time, ended with negotiations giving Aceh special autonomy to run its own government based on the special characteristics of Aceh. With this special autonomy, Aceh has implemented regional regulations in the administration of government and the people life based on Islam as stated in the Qanun (Marliani Listianingsih 2019). The implementation of sharia in Aceh gave rise to a new formulation of Islamic Acehness identity, which further emphasized the dividing line between 'Muslims' and 'non-Muslims'. This in turn fostered, among other things, sentiment among Acehness towards non-Muslims (Makin 2016). Muhammad Ansor's study also shows that the factors that are correlated with the attitude of implementing Islamic law are the ideology of Islamism, intolerance and Acehness (Ansor 2011).

The results of the study above are reinforced by the results of the 2019 Religious Harmony Index survey released by the Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religion which shows West Sumatra and Aceh Provinces as the two provinces with the lowest scores. West Sumatra's score is 64.36 and Aceh's score is 60.24. The scores of these two provinces are below the national score of 73.83 (Sila and Fakhruddin 2020). At the city level, the results of the Setara Institute survey on the 2020 Tolerant Cities Index showed that the cities of Padang and Banda Aceh were the two cities with the lowest tolerance scores. Of the 94 cities that are the object of the Setara Institute study, the city of Padang is ranked 93 and the city of Banda Aceh is ranked 94 (Azhari and Halili 2021).

On the one hand, the results of studies of religious scholars in West Sumatra and Aceh show a style of religious studies that is independent, objective and scientifically rational. As can be seen from the studies by Husna Amin, Suraiya It, Nurus Shalihin, Sefriyono and Andri Ashadi. On the other hand, West Sumatra and Aceh are still exclusive areas for Islamic identity. Strengthening the Islamic identity of West Sumatra and Aceh is also accompanied by a tendency to be less tolerant in religion. As shown by the studies of Mellisa Crouch, Al Makin, Muhammad Ansor, as well as a survey by the Research and Development Agency and the Ministry of Religion and the Setara Institute.

The strengthening of Islamic identity in West Sumatra and Aceh accompanied by a tendency to be less tolerant in religion has implications for the existence of religious studies in these two regions. In recent years, religious studies in West Sumatra and Aceh, especially the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh have experienced a decline in new student interest. In the last five years, both the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh have little interest in new students. Both of these Departments have the least number of new students compared to other Departments on their respective campuses. A little interest in these new students can be seen in the following graph:



So far studies on the dynamics and development of the study of religions have emerged. In general, these studies cover at least two major themes, namely historical development studies and methodological studies. The studies dominantly based on developments and reflections on the Study of Religions in Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Bandung.

The study of historical development can be seen, for example, in the results of the study by Media Zainul Bahri and Ahmad Muttaqin. Zainul Bahri's Media Studies, as illustrated by the title "Wajah Studi Agama-Agama : Dari Era Teosofi Indonesia (1901-1940) to the Reformation, also discusses comprehensively the developments and changes in the landscape of religious studies in Indonesia for more than a hundred years.(Bahari 2015). Meanwhile, Ahmad Muttaqin's study discusses the treasures of religious studies that represent Western traditions, and Islamic classical traditions. Based on two traditions of religious studies, Western and Islamic Classics, as well as the latest developments in religious studies in North America, Ahmad Muttaqin offers three things that can be modified as material for the reconstruction of the institution of religious studies in Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam (PTAI), such the implementation of a dual degree program for students Department of Religious Studies, diversification of department's name, and strengthening of comparative perspectives(Muttaqin 2019).

While methodological studies, for example, in the results of the studies by Syafwan Rozi, Roro Sri Rejeki Waluyajati and Herlina Nurani, Syamsul Maarif et al. Syafwan Rozi's study explains the emergence of social theory in the perspective of postmodernism such as the Foucauldian, Derrida and Habermas approaches forming a critical perspective for the approach and methodology of the study of religions(Rozi 2012). The study by Roro Sri Rejeki Waluyajati and Herlina Nurani shows the importance of changing the name of the Science of Comparative Religion to the Study of Religions. In addition, Roro Sri Rejeki Waluyajati and Herlina Nurani also offered that the existence of the Department of Religious Studies could be in line with the phenomenon of diversity in a plural Indonesian society, a pluralistic or holistic method was needed by prioritizing pluralism and accepting differences.(Waluyajati and Nurani 2016). Syamsul Maarif et al explores a central issue in religious studies, namely the paradigm of religion and religious studies based on reflections on teaching experience at the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS). In addition, the study of Syamsul Maarif et al also provides an overview of the latest developments in religious studies, particularly in English-speaking areas that have relevance to graduate-level religious studies programs in Indonesia (Maarif 2016).

Complementing the existing studies, this paper fills in the blanks on the dynamics and development of religious studies in two sharia areas, West Sumatra and Aceh. The socio-cultural characteristics of the people in both areas have strong Islamic overtones that affecting the existence, paradigm, and orientation of Religious studies in the two regions. Therefore, this paper aims to complement existing studies with a focus on understanding how the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh exist in both region.

The data sources in this paper consist of two sources, such as primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources come from Department Leaders, Lecturers, Students and Alumnae of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh who really know the existence of the Department of Religious studies at both university. This method called purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the selection of which the best subject to provide the required information. The researcher selects the sample based on an assessment of the characteristics of the sample members by which data is obtained that is in accordance with the intent and focus of the research. Secondary sources come from supporting data that are relevant to the focus of research such as research reports, journal articles, books, newspapers, magazines and archives.

Data collection techniques in the form of primary data from Department Leaders, Lecturers, Students and Alumni of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh are by interview and observation. Document data which is the primary data in this study was also obtained by documentation techniques. As for secondary data in the form of research reports, journal articles, books, newspapers, magazines, and archives obtained by documentation techniques.

After the data has been collected, all the data obtained is classified according to the focus of the research discussion. All data that has been obtained during observations, interviews and documentation in the field is carried out according to their respective classifications. The researcher grouped all the data obtained in the form of archives, field notes, pictures or photographs, along with other supporting documents into several classifications based on the focus of the problem to be studied. The classification of the data is done to make it easier for researchers to analyze the data at a later stage. Researchers then analyze using the theory that has been determined. In qualitative research, data analysis techniques are mostly carried out together with data collection.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Strategies for Department of Religious studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh to Continue the Existence in West Sumatra and Aceh**

Decreasing the number of new students in Department of Religious studies, both UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh caused by several factors: *first*, the current religious populism that has strengthened in recent years. According to Andri Ashadi, currents of religious populism tend to prioritize the interests of the majority, strengthening past traditions that have actually been running for a long time. For the Religious studies in Yogyakarta and Jakarta it may still be well received, but for West Sumatra, Aceh or in Medan, people are starting to lose interest in the Religious studies. Religious populism might be more accepting of Islam and Religious Studies, because all that is Islamist is put forward and this is evident from the many new Departments at UIN where all those who use the word Islam have a place for new student enthusiasts (Andri Ashadi, Personal Communication, September, 4, 2022).

*Second*, worries to studying other religions. The naming of the Department of Religious studies requires that this Department compiles a curriculum that includes courses on studies of religions other than Islam. Studying other religions also raises concerns for both parents and prospective new students. This was revealed by Nofal Lianta based on experience in the field. According to Nofal Lianta, from the parents' point of view, the Religious Studies Department, which did not make the Study of Religions a priority, was not chosen over other Departments, this was because they were still worried that they would get to know other religions further (Nofal Lianta, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

*Third*, changing people's mindset about graduate employment. Apart from the current religious and populism worries about Religious studies other than Islam, the lack of interest in new students of the Department of Religious studies is also due to the pattern of society that is more towards the mindset 'Where to Work after Graduation'. According to Taslim, today's society is a society that is undergoing change, the change concerns the future. Parents tend to think that if their children go to college, what kind of job will they get in the future. So that this change affects the Department of Religious studies. In line with Taslim, according to Juwairi, when parents are going to send their children to college, the first thing parents need to know is what their child's future will be like. It's not seen in what Department, but

the most important thing is for parents after graduating from college where they will work (Taslim HM Yasin, Personal Communication, August, 12, 2022).

*Fourth*, society's negative stigma towards the name of the Department of Religious studies. Even though the name of the Department has changed from Comparative of Religion to Religious Studies. But the negative stigma against the name of the Department is still a factor in the lack of interest in students of the Department of Religious studies in both university. Khairil said that when he came to the field he saw that many people were afraid of the name Religious studies. According to Mawardi, the name Comparative of Religion has become a problem in society, as well as the name Religious studies, perhaps because the dual religions are causing doubts. Likewise, according to Susilawati, nomenclature is also very influential because when the conversion of Comparative of Religion to Religious studies is expected to increase the number of new students, but in recent years decreasing interest in this Department happens. Perhaps it would be better if the name " Religious studies" was added to Islam. Like the Aqidah of Philosophy Department, for example, previously the Aqidah of Philosophy was then changed to Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy plus Islam behind its name.

*Fifth*, incomplete understanding of campus leaders and lecturers towards the Department of Religious studies. In addition to the several factors above, the lack of interest in new students is also due to a lack of understanding by leaders and lecturers of the Department of Religious studies both at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. According to Khairil, he experienced that leaders were still afraid of the Department of Religious studies, they were afraid to insure it in society, they still did not understand about the Religious studies. In fact, in early 2016, the Religious studies wanted to be closed, but Minister of Religion said 'even only one student in the Department of Religious studies, this department will not be closed'. Even at UIN, Khairil saw that lecturers outside of Ushuluddin were still afraid of the Department of Religious Studies. According to Khairil, in general academic community still underestimates the Department of Religious studies (Khairil Fazal, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022). Likewise, what happened to Dwi Wahyuni, during an audience with Vice Rector for academic and institutional of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang,

The few of new students in recent years show a lack of existence of religious studies in West Sumatra and Aceh, especially the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Therefore, institutionally, the Department along with the Department lecturers, students and alumni have made efforts to ensure that the Department of Religious studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh continue to exist in West Sumatra and Aceh. These strategic efforts are: *first*, strengthening the profile of graduates of the Department of Religious Studies. *Second*, the socialization of the Department of Religious Studies to schools and the community. *Third*, provide Tuition Fee relief for students of the Department of Religious Studies *Fourth*, audiences with graduate users to widely open job opportunities for graduates of the Department of Religious Studies.

### ***Strengthening the profile of graduates of the Department of Religious Studies***

The curriculum of the Department of Religious Studies in UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh referred to the KKNI. The latest curriculum used in Department of Religious Studies UIN Imam Bonjol Padang is the 2017 KKNI curriculum, while the curriculum Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh is the 2022 KKNI curriculum. Based on the curriculum document data, the following is the graduate profile Department of Religious Studies in UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh:

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Profile of Graduates of the Department of Religious Studies

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UIN Imam Bonjol Padang	UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Researchers in the field of religion and religious life</li><li>2. Facilitator of religious life</li><li>3. Playner (planner) of religious life</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Thinker the Relations of Religions</li><li>2. Analyst of Relational Problems of Religions</li><li>3. Assistant Researcher on Religions and Social Religion</li></ol>

The preparation and refinement of graduate profiles in the curriculum has been carried out by the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh is an important part of the strategy to continue to exist in their respective areas. As stated by Andri Ashadi:

Of course, we hope that students can be oriented to be able to live in diversity, diversity with minorities and diversity with internal Islam itself, our curriculum has prepared for that, I think since 2017 we have prepared a curriculum with very varied subjects which in general directly or indirectly actually already implies a moderate curriculum. However, the achievement of lecture goals depends on the lecturer himself. So our stance, we must be part of it, part of the attitude of moderation and part of the national current which indeed leads to moderation especially in Religious Studies, this should be the spearhead of the government and us as lecturers certainly support that (Andri Ashadi, Personal Communication, September, 4, 2022).

Both the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh have also attempted to implement the curriculum in the learning process either in the local classroom or outside the classroom. As stated by Taslim:

As a lecturer, I have two responsibility, the first teach student, so whether we like it or not, we have to improve students who are already enrolled in the Department of Religious Studies, both in the classroom and outside of it, for example consulting and so on. Don't let it be a little bit, instead let it be, it will be a problem. As lecturers in the Religious Studies, we have to be serious about preparing lecture materials, lesson plans, courses, on time. So even though it's a little bit, don't let the quality be neglected, a little yes, but we have to accelerate the quality, we have to keep improving it and it has to be a top priority, that's one of my aspects as a lecturer, how do I improve their quality. This means that we have to be serious, don't get hung up on a small amount, but what about this small amount, can it be dignified, can be a high quality students and graduates, compete with students who have a large number of enthusiasts. that's what we're trying to do (Taslim HM Yasin, Personal Communication, August, 12 2022).

Strengthening the profile of graduates is also done by motivating students by lecturers. For Muhammad 'if I am here teaching Christology, Beliefs, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, I teach. Before I started teaching, I motivated students first and invited them to broaden their horizons on how we learn' (Muhammad, Personal Communication, August, 12 2022).

***Socialization of the Department of Religious Studies to schools and the community***

The Department of Religious Studies, both UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, have made efforts to continue their existence in both regions. In addition to strengthening the profile of graduates, socialization was also carried out in schools and the community. Socialization is carried out in person and also through digital media.

Socialization of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang through digital media can be accessed on several website pages: <https://saa-fu.uinib.ac.id/>; Facebook: Prodi SAA UIN Imam Bonjol Padang; Instagram: @saauinib; Youtube: saauin\_padang; Email:

[prodi\\_saa@uinib.ac.id](mailto:prodi_saa@uinib.ac.id). Socialization of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh through digital media can be accessed on several website pages: <http://saa.uin-ar-raniry.ac.id>; Instagram: hmpsaaaceh; Youtube: Prodi Studi Agama-Agama FUF; Email: [fuf.prodisaa@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:fuf.prodisaa@ar-raniry.ac.id).

Apart from using digital media, socialization is also carried out directly to several schools and the community. The Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang conducted outreach in early 2022 to a number of schools in various districts/cities in West Sumatra. Not only Department leaders and lecturers, the socialization also involved students. The socialization was carried out on January 25 2022 at MAN 2 Salindo, Pesisir Selatan; January 27, 2022 at SMA Padang Sago, Padang Pariaman 1 MAN; February 17, 2022 at SMK Negeri 1 Lembah Melintang; February 18, 2022 at SMK Gunung Tuleh; February 19, 2022 at MAN 1 West Pasaman. Meanwhile, the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh conducts outreach to schools or Dayahs. One of the socializations carried out was socialization at SMA Negeri 3 Putra Bangsa Aceh.

### ***Provide Tuition Fee relief for students of the Department of Religious Studies***

Strategic efforts to continue the existence are also carried out by providing tuition fee relief for students. Admission of new students at UIN Ar-Raniry in 2021 and 2022 opens a special pathway for the Department of Religious Studies with a category 1 tuition fee of Rp. 400,000/semester.

So in the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang did the same when accepting new students in 2022. Students who passed SPAN-PTKIN but did not re-register were contacted by the Department because they were given the opportunity to re-register with a low tuition fee of Rp. 1,600,000/semester.

### ***Audiences to graduate users to widely open job opportunities for graduates of the Department of Religious Studies***

In addition to socializing and providing tuition fee relief, a strategic effort made by the Department of R Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda is to address graduate users to widely open graduate job opportunities. Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh had an audience with relevant Aceh government agencies to widely open graduate job opportunities. As Mawardi said:

For example, in Aceh, let's say there is an Islamic Shari'a Service, at the Islamic Shari'a Service there is a program every year, namely the reception of DAI on the border. This is the land for graduates of the Department of Religious Studies. So on the border there is a risk of conflict, such as in Singkil Darusalam and then Southeast Aceh. It is the district where the people are heterogeneous, so border DAIs are placed. It's a shame that the DAI stationed there is not based on us being recruited by the Islamic Sharia Service. We have tried to have audiences and socialize with the relevant government agencies (Mawardi, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

Until this research was conducted, according to Mawardi, there had been no good progress from the results of the hearings conducted. Still, the acceptance of Border DAI in Aceh still provides great opportunities for other Departments that are more of a sharia character, such as Departments from the Faculty of Sharia and Law. Meanwhile, graduates of the UIN Ar-Raniry Banda, who should be a priority in being able to care for diversity in the border area, are still not given priority (Mawardi, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

In contrast to the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, the hearings that were conducted by the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang through the UIN Alumni Association yielded results. Recruitment of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) Career



Officers for D4, S1 and S2 graduates in 2021 and 2022 provides opportunities for graduates of the Department of Religious Studies. The name of the Department of Religious Studies is clearly stated in the announcement of the Recruitment of the TNI Career Officer (Andri Ashadi, Personal Communication, September, 4, 2022).

### **Contribution of Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh to Religious Life in West Sumatra and Aceh**

As an important part to exist in their respective areas, Department of Religious Studies, both UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh has contributed significantly to the religious life in West Sumatra and Aceh. The Department of Religious Studies in the two sharia regions has been able to balance the religious life of the community.

It is well known that universities must make a real contribution to the welfare and harmony of society in general. This is in accordance with the mandate of the law contained in the Tri Dharma concept of higher education as previously explained. The Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh must make a real contribution to creating a conducive climate for religious life so that people with different beliefs, ideologies and cultures/ethnicities can live in harmony and peace.

The new discourse that has developed recently is the Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam (PTKI) can provide a "plus-plus" role to this country, because PTKI has a scientific base that enable to integrate Islam and society. Islam able to combine religion and state (mutualism symbiosis). When public tertiary institutions focus more on applied pure science, PTKI is actually able to integrate Islamic knowledge and applied science. This is the main soul of changing the status of IAIN to UIN.

In line with the above, Suwendi, Head of Research and Community Service Sub-Directorate of the Ministry of Religion said that there are at least two fundamental advantages of PTKI compared to PTU, *first*, PTKI has a scientific basis to harmonize Islamic and scientific relations, *second*, PTKI has a contribution in building relations between Islam and the state (Kemenag.go.id).

In this study, the sharia area referred to Islamic hegemony and Islamic culture in the daily life of the people of West Sumatra and Aceh. Even though currently the population is heterogeneous, in this case the main role and task of the Department of Religious Studies that must be carried out to increase the inclusiveness of its citizens by community service programs, especially by lecturers. The theme of devotion should focus more on developing an attitude of religious moderation. Lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies deal directly with providing counseling to the community. The community must be instilled with the values of religious moderation, harmony, tolerance and being able to develop an attitude of agreeing on differences, respecting the religions and beliefs of other people.

The real contributions that have been made by the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh in West Sumatra and Aceh are *first*, increasing religious inclusiveness; *second*, the driving force of religious moderation; *third*, activists of tolerance discourse; *fourth*, increase inter-religious dialogue.

#### ***Increasing religious inclusiveness.***

Real evidence of this role can be seen from the efforts of the lecturers in providing understanding, counseling, upgrading or other activities directly for community. This direct counseling is in the form of religious lectures. Seven out of 11 male lecturers in the study of religions at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang are active as preachers/muballigh. The duty as a preacher is carried out during the month of Ramadan

(lectures before the tarwih prayer), Friday preachers, wirid-wirid on other days. Some lecturers are very consistent in giving lecture material about religious harmony, and tolerance which is wrapped in the concept of *hablumminannas* (establishing good relations with fellow human beings). This was conveyed by Andri Ashadi as a senior lecturer who is also the current dean of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Studies:

If I deliver more lecture, I deliver more about *hablumminannas*, I use language that is familiar to Minang people, such as the word "tulak ansua" to convey a message of tolerance. Tulak ansua is an expression in the Minang language which means the attitude of giving in to one another, limiting our freedom because there is freedom of others, and can mean an attitude of tolerance and *tapa selira*. When I gave a lecture I did not mention the word pluralism which was not familiar to the public, but I said the expression *balang* which means various colors. Then when alluding to events in Israel I did not mention the Jewish nation, but what I mentioned were the descendants of the prophet Ya'qub. (Andri Ashadi, Personal Communication, September, 4, 2022).

Faisal also very often gives lectures related to tolerance, the different realities of life and *ukhuwah* among humans. Material often conveyed when giving lectures, both in front of students and the congregation is the concept of pluralism and plurality. According to Faisal, pluralism and plurality often have the same meaning, even though they are different. Most Minang people are anti with the word pluralism, and sometimes also anti with the word plurality, even though both are contradictory (Faisal, Personal Communication, September, 3, 2022).

When the researcher asked about his activities as a lecturer in the Study of Religions, Faisal said: I always associate almost every religious lecture with the message contained in the Al Quran surah Al Hujurat verse 13... we make you nations and tribes so you know each other... That is when I gave lectures at mosques, at KUB forums (religious harmony) and at seminars (Faisal, Personal Communication, September, 3, 2022).

Then in another part, Ikhwan said that he has an interest in carrying out the mission of the Department of Religious Studies, such developing a religious life that was tolerant, harmonious and mutually respectful. Further, Ikhwan said that almost every moment of the lectures in various places they always conveyed religious topics in a moderate manner, with the principle of living fortunately and peacefully: '...religious moderation is the middle way...religious is easy, being religious in the midst of other people who are also religious...don't until they lose money' (Ikhwan, Personal Communication, October, 24, 2022).

Then other activities carried out by Department lecturers that are in accordance with the mission of Religious Studies are multicultural education assistance carried out by the 2019 Religious Studies Department Service Team with Faisal as chairman. The purpose of this activity is to increase multicultural understanding for students of the Kota Pariaman College of Tarbiyah Sciences (STIT). The basis of this activity is 'to provide basic multicultural knowledge to prospective teachers so that in the future it can be transmitted to students at school'. The reason for taking the location in Pariaman was because Pariaman City was known as a more homogeneous area in terms of religious beliefs in West Sumatra than other cities. It is hoped that this activity will increase insight into the diversity of prospective teachers in the city (Faisal, Personal Communication, September, 3, 2022)

Another activity that embodies the role of the lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies is the activity of the Fostered Prayer Room in Sungai Balik Village, Koto Tengah District, Padang City. Sungai Balik is a location in the northernmost corner of Padang City which borders the Bukit Barisan mountains. This location is inhabited by around 40 households which are classified as undeveloped areas. The people there really crave the presence of a house of worship, a *mushalla*. The average

population does not yet understand religion widely, so they need assistance. Makhsus as a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies is committed to developing the religious life of the Balik River area with individual service activities. Makhsus is committed to socializing tolerant Islam to the people of Sungai Balik in the future.

Likewise with the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, the lecturers have become activists of the discourse of tolerance in Aceh. With various opportunities in the management structure of institutions or social organizations, Department lecturers continue to campaign for the importance of tolerance. Taslim said, "Apart from being a lecturer, in 2017-2018 I was also a member of the Banda Aceh City Ulama Boarding School. For social activities alhamdulillah, for activities like this, for example I am at the Provincial FKUB, at ICMI I am also an administrator, at Al Wasyiah I am also an administrator, at Insan Budi I am also an administrator. So for social religious social activities, we are involved and we always participate" (Taslim, HM Yasin, Personal Communication, August, 12, 2022).

In line with Taslim, Muhammad also said:

I am the head of the PKM board, then in my house area, I live in a police housing, I am also an administrator there, there is a football group, there is a Majelis Talim, there is a group, for example, bikers lovers. Then there are all kinds of groups involved. It's interesting that in the bikers group there are also non-Muslims, Indians and soldiers. Alhamdulillah, now he has converted to Islam, so apart from our study groups, we are also active in the Al Wasyiah group and then at NU. people were surprised so because we often had discussions and conducted studies we finally focused, and I saw that if we made a special course people didn't want to come, but by the way I gave lectures in the mosque I included material and so did I when I was in a football group or bikers (Muhammad, Personal Communication, August, 12, 2022).

### ***Religious moderation activator.***

Based on the data, it can be said that the role of the Department of Religious Studies in West Sumatra and Aceh is a driving force for religious moderation, both among students, lecturers and the community. The fulfillment of the function of this role can be seen from the various activities carried out by the Department and by the lecturers.

Nofal Liata (Secretary of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh) said that 'just like yesterday, he received an invitation to attend the event at the moderation house. We have to be ready and if the regional office asks us to deliver study in at the Training Center about moderation, these are things that are still in line with the vision and mission of the Religious Studies, in the community I also have a permanent role as a moderate academic of the Religious Studies (Nofal Liata, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

Talking about concepts such as tolerance, pluralism or religious moderation must look at the situation and conditions of the area where these concepts are conveyed. In Aceh it is important to be careful with a new concept that is brought up from the center, it is often difficult for the people of Aceh to accept these concepts. This was conveyed by Noval Dinata 'Indeed, I admit that admitting being moderate in society is not easy, but I learned a lot from seniors there that to convey something moderate does not have to be moderate... if we still use the word moderate it will difficult to accept' (Nofal Liata, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

During the research that emerged from the activities of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh was the enthusiasm to activate what is known as the House of Religious Moderation (RMB). Five lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies are actively involved in the UIN

Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Religious Moderation House. The House of Religious Moderation was initiated by the government during the time of Fahrul Razi as Minister of Religion. The first PTKIN to establish a Religious Moderation House was UIN Sunan Gunung Jadi Bandung in 2019. The Religious Moderation House is a manifestation of the state's presence in society through Islamic Education and not to moderate religion, but to moderate the religious way of its followers.

The Religious Moderation House of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh was established in 2021 chaired by Dr. Mawardi, MA who is also the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Arraniry Banda Aceh. Five lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies are actively involved in the management of the House of Religious Moderation, namely Dr. Mawardi, MA; Dr. Muhammad, MA; dr. Juwaini, M.Ag; Dr. Husna Amin, M.Hum; dr. Suraiya IT, MA, Ph.D. Of the five lecturers, three lecturers have been certified TOT namely Dr. Mawardi, MA; Dr. Muhammad, MA; dr. Juwaini, M.Ag, but not for two other lecturers yet.

Department of Religious Studies at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh actively carries out seminars and workshops with the theme of strengthening the values of religious moderation. From 22 to 25 June 2021 a Religious Moderation Workshop was held which was attended by 160 lecturers from various disciplines throughout UIN Arraniry. The activity took the theme: Religious Moderation: Strategies for Penetrating Religious Values in Islamic Higher Education. The main purpose of this activity is to explore the ideas and thoughts of religious moderation that lecturers can apply in learning that is adapted to Acehese culture. The speaker in this workshop is Dr. Ahmad Suaedy Dean of the Archipelago Islamic Faculty, NU University Jakarta and Dr. Junaidi Simun from Research and Advocacy Manager of the Titian Peace Institute, Jakarta.

On March 22, 2022, a Seminar on Religious Moderation for College Students was held. The main objective of this activity is to increase students' understanding of the importance of tolerance and peaceful life side by side with all elements of the nation. Besides that, it is also to minimize the understanding of intolerance on the UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh campus. This event was opened by Dr. Mawardi, MA as the head of the Department of Religious Studies. The speakers who were invited were Dr. Wadji, M.Pd Lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Kanjuruhan University, Malang, East Java and Dr. Nur Hadi national instructor of Religious Moderation of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Nur Hadi said that radicalism has targeted millennials on campuses.

### ***Tolerance discourse activist.***

The real role of the lecturer in the Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang in this case is to be active in structural organizations and activities of the Regional Government and community organizations, so that the personal "bargaining value" of the Department lecturers is quite high.

When this research was conducted, some of the lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang had held strategic positions on the UIN Imam Bonjol Padang campus, as summarized in the table below:

Lecturer	Position
Dr. Ikhwan, SH, M.Ag	1. Deputy Chancellor I UIN Imam Bonjol Padang 2. Deputy Chancellor III UIN Imam Bonjol Padang 3. Dean of the Faculty of Sharia
Dr. Andri Ashadi, M.Ag	Dean of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Studies
Nurus Shalihin, M.Si., Ph.D	1. Deputy Dean I of the Faculty of Syari'ah 2. Dean of the Faculty of Science

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Dr. Sefriyono	Head of Research Center of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang (Current Position)
Dr. Junizar Suratman,	Head of Internal Quality of LPPM UIN Imam Bonjol Padang
Dr. Faisal, M.Ag	Expert Staff of the Chancellor of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang from 2016 to 2018

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Based on the table above, three lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies serve as deans, such as the Dean of the Faculty of Sharia, the Dean of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Studies and the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology. While two other people served as head of the center. With such conditions, the potential for lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies at UIN IB Padang is very strategic to play a role in the midst of the religious life of the people of West Sumatra.

In addition to holding high positions on campus, they are also entrusted with holding certain positions in government and community religious organizations.

Below is the involvement of the lecturers of the Department of Religious Studies in the field of Government and social organizations:

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Lecturer	Position
Dr. Ikhwan, SH, M.Ag	1. The expert team for the Governor of West Sumatra in the field of religion and culture from 2019 to 2021 2. MUI management and also the West Sumatra FKUB Law and Legislation Commission
Nurus Shalihin, Ph.D	Team of Experts for the Regent of Agam Regency in the field of culture and nagari (2017)
Dr. Andri Ashadi, M.Ag	NU Board of West Sumatra
Dr. Faisal, M.Ag	1. West Sumatra MUI administrator in the field of religious harmony 2. Management of FKUB West Sumatra in the field of religious harmony (Current Position)
Ayu Rustriana, M.Ag	Has served as treasurer of BNPT/FKPT for West Sumatra Region in 2016 - 2019

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With strategic positions above, they have more time and opportunities to provide counseling in the form of resource persons in various activities. So that the role of the lecturer to carry out the mission of the Department of Religious Studies can get more opportunities.

Interview with Dr. Faisal, who is active in FKUB and the West Sumatra MUI, is often asked to be speaker for seminars or training... I always associate it with harmony material... minimum 50 percent in every material presented..Intense interactions are also made with church leaders and Buddhist leaders in Padang City (Faisal, Personal Communication, September, 3, 2022).

According to Faisal, tolerance can only be realized by adding insight into the nature of living together as God's creatures. As a moderate Muslim intellectual figure, Faisal also feels compelled to increase the role of the West Sumatra FKUB in maintaining harmony, harmony and dialogue between believers.religion in West Sumatra. In 2011, he and the Ushuluddin Faculty Research Team conducted research on the Role of FKUB in Improving Religious Harmony in West Sumatra. One of the recommendations resulting from the research is how to establish an FKUB in an area that still rejects the existence of the forum (Tanah Datar and Pesisir Selatan), namely by holding a dialogue and clarifying to the local community in detail the aims and objectives of this FKUB while taking into account their

respective to local wisdom of each area that rejected it (research report not published). Apart from that, models or forms of harmony can be accepted by all parties must also be determined.

Meanwhile, Ikhwan, who are also active in MUI and FKUB, did not forget to deliver material related to religious tolerance. Ikhwan often conveys 'religion is profitable, avoid conflicts will only make harm (Ikhawan) Ikhwan have more opportunities to provide counseling to the community because he is often be a speaker at local forums related to his current position as Deputy Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of Sharia, preacher, Friday preacher, active in MUI and also FKUB West Sumatra.

### ***Increase inter-religious dialogue.***

Another effort of the Department of Religious Studies for a harmony in religious life in West Sumatra is to foster and intensify inter-religious dialogue. The Department of Religious Studies establishes a House of Worship as a place for student practice their knowledge. The houses of worship are the Padang GPBI Church, Padang Buddhawarman Temple and Jagadnata Tabing Padang Temple. The purpose of practical field in places of worship is directly introducing the forms of worship and beliefs of people of other religions, it is also to establish communication between students, lecturers and people of other religions. Religious figures in the practical location are getting to know UIN students and lecturers.

Then to intensify communication between Departments, other religious parties and the government, the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang established an MoU with the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of West Sumatra whose contents were to provide facilities for students to use the KUB Building facilities (Building for religious harmony) which is in the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion and facilitates students and lecturers to communicate with the Christian Binmas, Hindu and Buddhist Binmas subdivisions in the Regional Office.

Inter-religious dialogue in West Sumatra has also been increased in intensity by students of the Department of Religious Studies in various communities. Some students are actively involved in the Padang City Interfaith Youth Community (PELITA), some are active in the West Sumatra Peace Ambassador community. In addition, the activities of the Department Student Association (HMP) are also active in intensifying inter-religious dialogue in West Sumatra. In this way, the intensity of dialogue between students of Religious Studies, lecturers, campus officials and leaders of other religious communities will be higher. When you know each other, the harmony between religious communities in West Sumatra will be even better.

To develop dialogue with people of other religions, the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Arraniry also held a Seminar and Workshop by bringing in speakers from Buddhism on September 16, 2021. The theme of this event was Tips for Buddhists in Grounding the Value of Religious Moderation in Indonesia. The speakers for this event were Dr. Mawardi and Dr. Muhammad from the Department of Religious Studies, Kho Khie Siong Chairperson of the Aceh Chinese Ethnic Hakka Foundation and Ketut Panji Budiawan from PembimasBuddhist Regional Office of the Aceh Ministry of Religion. According to Mawardi, this activity will open students' and lecturers' insights about the moderation concept offered by Buddhism. In addition, it will also increase the dialogue between students and lecturers in Aceh with Buddhist leaders in Aceh. In this way, a sense of tolerance will be created (Mawardi, Personal Communication, August, 10, 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

Even though the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh are still not well known by the public, this can be seen from the lack of interest in new

students in the two Departments. However, the contribution of the two Departments has provided a place to balance the religious life of the people of West Sumatra and Aceh. The dynamics faced by the Department of Religious Studies in the sharia regions, West Sumatra and Aceh have formed the Department of Religious Studies which is unique compared to other regions. In many ways the Department of Religious Studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh have transformed towards the Religious Studies as a result of adaptation to the typical socio-cultural conditions of the people of West Sumatra and Aceh.

By seeing this existence, the Department of Religious Studies, both UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh actually have prospective in the future. The increasingly complex religious life of West Sumatra and Aceh does not only make religion 'sexy' to study, but also raises new approaches and issues in religious studies which are expected to solve the problems of the religious life of West Sumatra and Aceh.

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